

Alaska Fairgrounds Earmark

\$380,000 earmark for the construction of recreation and fairground area in Kotzebue, Alaska

The Fiscal Year 2009 omnibus appropriations bill includes a \$380,000 earmark for Kotzebue, Alaska, for construction of recreation and fairgrounds area. This amendment would remove this earmark.

With a population 3,135, this earmark essentially provides \$120 per Kotzebue resident for recreation

Kotzebue, Alaska, had a population of 3,135 as of 2007.^[1]

The \$380,000 earmark would essentially provide more than \$120 per resident of Kotzebue for a recreation and fairgrounds area.

Misplaced priorities: More than one-third of Kotzebue residents do not have jobs with 13 percent are living in poverty and Congress' answer is to give the town a fairgrounds

Like the rest of the nation, unemployment rates have been on the rise in Alaska. The state Labor Department reported in January that Alaska's unemployment rate has reached its highest level in nearly five years.^[2]

Kotzebue has been disproportionately impacted by unemployment and poverty.

Data from the U.S. Census showed 1,255 Kotzebue residents as employed. The unemployment rate at that time was 9.8 percent, although 36.78 percent of all adults were not in the work force. More than 13 percent of residents were living below the poverty level.^[3]

^[1] State of Alaska Community Database Online,

http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm?Comm_Boro_Name=Kotzebue

^[2] "Alaska unemployment is on the rise," Alaska Public Radio Network, January 23, 2009;

<http://aprn.org/2009/01/23/alaska-unemployment-is-on-the-rise/>

^[3] State of Alaska Community Database Online,

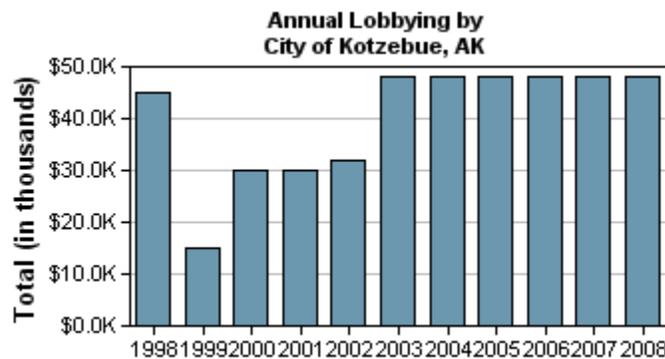
http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm?Comm_Boro_Name=Kotzebue

Clearly, Kotzebue residents have far greater basic needs than the lack of a fairgrounds or other recreation.

Kotzebue has spent the same amount on lobbying in recent years as it will be earmarked for the fairgrounds in the omnibus

The city government of Kotzebue spent \$48,000 on lobbying expenditures in 2008.^[4] Since 2000, the city has spent \$380,000 on lobbying—the same amount as the city will receive from the congressional earmark for the fairgrounds.

Had the city redirected its lobbying expenditures towards the fairgrounds project, a congressional earmark would not have been necessary and taxpayers could have been saved \$380,000.



Kotzebue has received millions of dollars in earmarks

Despite its relatively small population, Kotzebue has been the recipient of millions of dollars in congressional earmarks over the past several years. These include \$2,000,000 for a “Municipal Road Paving Project” in 2005^[5] and \$479,000 for the Mavsigviq Family Recovery Program in 2008.^[6]

Kotzebue boasts many recreational options for residents and visitors

^[4] <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientsum.php?lname=City+of+Kotzebue%2C+AK&year=2008>

^[5] http://www.earmarks.omb.gov/authorization_earmarks/earmark_187788.html

^[6] http://www.earmarks.omb.gov/2008-earmarks/earmark_338542.html

Kotzebue has many recreational opportunities such as hiking, hunting, and a nearby national park. In fact, TripAdvisor.com notes that “if you're going to stay in town, there's plenty to see and do.”^[7]

At the nearby Kobuk Valley National Park, “boating, camping, hiking, backpacking, wildlife watching, photography, and fishing opportunities abound. With winter arctic survival skills and personal equipment, snow machining, skiing and dog mushing is also possible. Community programs are available in the summer at the Innaigvik Education and Information Center. Topics include natural and cultural history of the park, local research, local crafts and children’s activities.”^[8]

The Alaska press has criticized the fairgrounds earmark as well as other recreation projects contained within the omnibus spending bill

Last week, the *Anchorage Daily News* published an editorial critical of the congressional earmark for fairgrounds in Kotzebue as well as other frivolous Alaska projects tucked into the omnibus spending bill. The editorial pointed out:

“During the stimulus debate, Republicans made a huge fuss over the possibility that the federal money might be used for recreation projects or museums or other alleged frills. ...

“But lo and behold, it turns out those types of projects are worthy of good ol’ ordinary federal dollars. The new federal spending bill includes \$380,000 for recreation and fairgrounds work in Kotzebue and \$475,000 for the same purpose in Wrangell. ‘Adaptive and therapeutic’ recreation efforts in Alaska stand to get \$571,000 of federal money. ...

“The federal dollar that the stimulus might have spent on recreation projects is no different from the federal dollar spent on recreation in the pending appropriations bill. It all comes from the same pot of borrowed money.”^[9]

^[7] <http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g60756-s4/Kotzebue:Alaska:Things.To.Do.html>

^[8] <http://www.nps.gov/kova/planyourvisit/things2do.htm>

^[9] <http://www.adn.com/opinion/view/story/702775.html>